

Meissen Porcelain Figures in the Royal Court Pantries in Dresden, Warsaw and Hubertusburg:

A Crash Course in the Hof-Conditorei inventories taken ahead of the Seven Years War<sup>1</sup>

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Clare Le Corbeiller raised our awareness of the function of porcelain figures on the dessert table in a lecture she delivered at the International Ceramics Fair and Seminar in 1987 entitled "Porcelain as Sculpture." Subsequently published in the 1988 handbook, she noted that European porcelain figures were conspicuously absent from the mid-eighteenth-century interiors portrayed by artists. After rhetorically posing the question "If porcelain sculpture was not a collector's medium in the salon or library, then where was it?" she answered it: "In the office, the pantry, where the chef d'office prepared the desserts. And this introduces what is perhaps the most immediate inspiration for porcelain as sculpture: sugar sculpture."

In the intervening quarter century, notwithstanding that some Meissen figures and tablewares are marked "K.H.C." for Königliche Hof-Conditorei [Royal Court Pantry] and that three centuries of court pantry inventories survive in the Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv in Dresden, the go-to sources have been and remain the Arbeitsberichte, the historic manufactory work reports held by the Meissen archives, and the Japanese Palace inventories deposited in the Porzellansammlung and in the Hauptstaatsarchiv in Dresden<sup>2</sup>. The Arbeitsberichte are weekly logs of the activities of the modeling studio

staff and allow us to date a model and assign it to one sculptor or another. Some entries indicate who commissioned the model or the intended recipient but there is no confirmation that a model was actually cast in porcelain or how many examples of a model might have been produced. Also, the work reports were suspended from 1749-54 and again during the Seven Years War, 1756-63, so there are critical gaps just as

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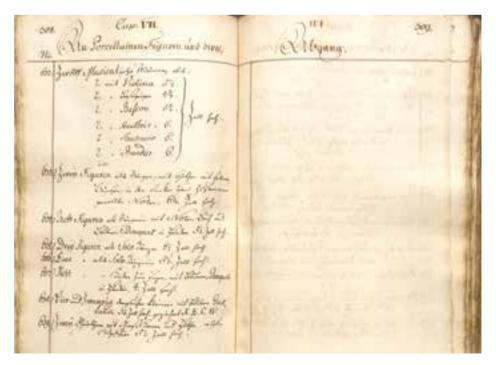
figural production at Meissen hit its stride<sup>3</sup>. The three inventories of the Japanese Palace (1721-27, 1770 and 1779 with later additions) record the ceramics and other furnishings of Augustus the Strong's fantastical 'porcelain palace' and can be used to establish provenance but the Meissen figures displayed or stored in the palace were almost exclusively the large Meissen animals and birds that preceded small figure production for the dessert.

**Figure 1.** A page from the 1733 Dresden Hof-Conditorei inventory (with entries to 1748).

The court pantry was responsible for the edibles and table decorations for the dessert course, the grand finale of any formal meal. The figures and other porcelains required for setting the table were stored in the pantry in cabinets, wooden crates and crowded shelves that probably resembled modern museum storerooms or study storage. The pantry was one of four distinct departments involved in mounting a state banquet. The others were the court kitchen, which prepared the savories for the first three courses of the meal, the court cellar, which was responsible for the beverages and drink wares, and the silver vault, which provided the precious table wares and some porcelain dishes. The pantry was the only department with porcelain figures.

The porcelains and other equipment belonging to the court pantry were inventoried at different points in time. The 1733 inventory has entries through 1748 (Fig. 1). The first figures commissioned for table decoration appear in the Arbeitsberichte in 1735 but this production was not for the king; rather, it was for Count Sulkowski and his successor, Count Brühl. The first porcelain figures commissioned for the royal table were decorations for the three royal marriages of 1747; they appear in the Arbeitsberichte in 1746 and were delivered to the court pantry between 1746 and 1748. According to the inventory, there were three times as many white figures as enameled ones; of the approximately 1400 small porcelain sculptures, 320 were polychrome and 1065 were white. This number does not include dozens of pedestals for figural sculptures, trees, regalia, small vases and the hundreds of architectural components required for a classical temple<sup>4</sup>. The 1752 inventory (with additions through 1764) lists approximately 3000 figures; around 1000 were enameled and twice as many were white (Fig. 2).





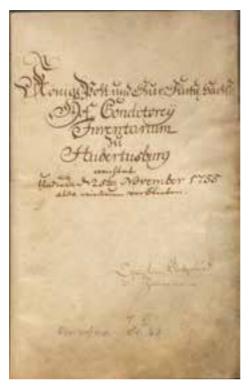


Figure 2. A page from the 1752

**Figure 3.** A page from the 1750 Warsaw Hof-Conditorei inventory.

Figure 4. Cover page to the

delivery lists for the 1755 Hubertusburg Hof-Conditorei.

**Figure 5.** A page from the 1841 Dresden Hof-Conditorei

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inventory.

with entries to 1764 and later

undates in pencil.

Dresden Hof-Conditorei inventory

Dresden was not the only seat in the Saxon-Polish realm with a court pantry. A 1750 inventory (with additions through 1764) exists for a pantry in Warsaw, where August III spent much of each year as King of Poland (Fig. 3). That inventory indicates around 1400 enameled figures and 1600 white ones. There was also a short-lived court pantry in the royal hunting palace of Hubertusburg, a regular stop for the court en route to the thrice-yearly Leipzig fairs and for foreign ministers; that inventory dates to 1755 and records approximately 1400 enameled figures and 1500 in white (Fig. 4). Otherwise, equipment and decorations from the Dresden court pantry were shuttled as needed to other palaces in the orbit of Dresden by the *Reiseconditor*.

After the Seven Years War, in 1768, the royal court pantries were consolidated in Dresden. By the time of

the 1774 inventory, Acier was producing decorative biscuit sculpture at Meissen and the stock of old-fashioned glazed figures had declined to approximately 1500 polychrome figures and 700 white ones<sup>5</sup>. In 1841, there were only 51 enameled figures and none of the white (Fig. 5). Although a small number of dessert-type figures are indicated in the 1768 inventory of the so-called "Porcellain-Cabinet" in the roval Taschenberg Palais in Dresden, signaling a shift in appreciation and function from table decoration to collector's item, it is not known if they migrated there from the court pantry<sup>6</sup>. The small Meissen figures in the Porzellansammlung

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today were acquired in the early twentieth-century to round out the eighteenth-century holdings and are not, therefore, directly descended from the royal court pantries.

Small Meissen figures were also deployed on ministerial tables and accompanied diplomatic gifts. In 1753, Count von Brühl owned approximately 2000 figures, enameled and white<sup>7</sup>. 184 Meissen figures were shipped to Russia in 1745 with the St. Andrew Service, over 200 were gifted to France in 1747 and 172 figures went to Sir Charles Hanbury Williams in 1750. Add these to the numbers in the royal inventories and there were at least 11,000 Meissen dessert figures in existence by the outbreak of the Seven Years War and half were glazed white8. Comparison of the Dresden and Warsaw inventories, however, shows that dozens of figures inventoried in the Dresden Hof-Conditorei were actually transferred to Warsaw in 1748, where they were inventoried again. Thus the total of 11,000 is incorrect and must be reconsidered9. Nevertheless, the scarcity of glazed white Meissen figures today aligns with the recent scientific evidence for later enameling on rococo models (Fig. 6).

The 1750 Warsaw and 1752 Dresden inventories exist in duplicate. Presumably one copy was kept by the Oberhofmarschallamt (chief household administration) while the other was on-site in the pantry. At some point one copy of each inventory was updated in pencil (see Fig. 2), perhaps during the consolidation of 1768, indicating such significant losses and damage to the collection, the 1841 tally of just fifty-one figures is unsurprising. Although most of the entries are very specific in naming and describing a figure in a way that correlates with known models, helped by very precise measurements, large numbers of Commedia figures in the 1752 Dresden inventory are lumped together as if the secretary didn't know who was who: "147 Stück, verschiedene Mannes. Masquerade- u. Theatral. Figuren" or "26. Stück Masquen in Domino." In some instances, white figures are noted to have painting or gilding applied by the chef d'office who was accustomed to painting and gilding sugar sculpture. Children with wings are indicated in the royal court pantries ("Kinder mit Flügeln" or "stehende Cupidos mit Masquen"), as opposed to the children without wings commissioned by marchands-mercier for export to France. Monkey Band figures, likewise in the French

**Figure 6.** A group of white Meissen figures, animals and trees in the Residenz, Munich.

Figure 7a. 7b. A plate and two of several dozen small vases for the dessert in the 'Hubertusburg' pattern. Meissen porcelain, ca. 1740. H. 2.3 cm. Stiftung Ernst Schneider in Schloss Lustheim.





taste, do not appear in the royal inventories though Count Brühl owned at least eighteen. Pieces marked "K.H.C." or "K.H.C.W." are so-noted in the inventories, for example: "598. Acht Groupgen, jede von 3. Kinder, als 1. liegend, das 2te. kniend, und das 3te. stehend 3 ¾ Zoll hoch gezeichnet K.H.C.W." Some items marked "K.H.C." were among those transferred to Warsaw and the Dresden mark is indicated in the Warsaw inventory. The bulk of the porcelains were unmarked, however, so an unmarked figure that conforms to an entry could rightly have a royal provenance.

Porcelain from the factory in Meissen came by wagon or boat to the Warenlager (warehouse) in Dresden, the way station for porcelain destined for the Japanese Palace, the royal palaces, the fairs or for export abroad. A delivery list for the Hubertusburg court pantry indicates it was assembled between September and November 1755 from stock at the factory and items in the Dresden Warenlager (Fig. 4). King August III and his family resided in the palace of Hubertusburg between Oct. 1 and Nov. 29, 1755, spending Oct. 8-17 at the fair in Leipzig. Various family occasions were celebrated at Hubertusburg with a succession of banquets doubtless requiring elaborate desserts. A Meissen table service decorated with butterflies, a pattern long known to collectors, accompanied the dessert figures sent to Hubertusburg, indicating it was a royal pattern which could perhaps be identified hereafter as the 'Hubertusburg' service (Fig. 7)10.

At his death in 1763, Count Brühl owned at least seven Meissen table services and a royal-size collection of porcelain figures and decorations for the dessert. The Meissen decorations included sixty-two small buildings ("Zwey und sechzig Stück Häuser von diversen Sorten") as well as trees, animals, people, garden architecture and an imposing porcelain miniature of the Mattielli fountain at Brühl's palace in Dresden's Friedrichstadt district.<sup>11</sup> Sir Charles Hanbury Williams witnessed the fountain running with rosewater at a banquet for 206 persons hosted by Brühl in 1748, where it functioned



as a representation of the Count's Dresden properties and, by extension, his ministerial position and noble title<sup>12</sup>. The visual magnificence of his three-dozen palaces and properties in Saxony and his art collections were a statement of the legitimacy of his position as Prime Minister. Within the Polish realm, he



likewise built a network of self-sustaining estates in Grochwitz, Nischwitz, Młociny, Wola, Nowy Świat and elsewhere to convey the same message. Akin to Schloss Pförten in Brody, the Polish estates were conceived by royal architects like Matthäus Daniel Pöppelmann and Johann Christoph Knöffel and each featured a palace with formal gardens and water features supported by a town with a church, townhouses, farms and hunting grounds (Figs. 8, 9 and 10).13 An inventory of Brühl's pantry taken in 1753 listed nearly a hundred small buildings, naming four churches, three palaces, fifty-one 'townhouses,' thirteen farmhouses and six gondolas, as would be required for representing the Prime Minister's Polish estates in a representational fashion (Figs. 11 and 12).14 Such buildings were not a feature of the royal court pantries, underscoring the individuality and originality of Brühl's approach to white gold. 15

**Figure 8.** Aerial view of the former Brühl estate of Schloss Pförten.

Figure 9. Design for the palace for the Brühl estate in Nischwitz. Landesamt für Denkmalpflege Sachsen, PS-M36-II-BI. 5.

**Figure 10.** J. Fr. Knöbel design for a church for the Brühl estate in Wola.







Figure 11. Church. Meissen porcelain, ca. 1750-60. From Melitta Kunze-Köllensperger, Idylle in Porzellan (Leipzig, 1996), p. 20, fig. 5.

**Figure 12.** Townhouse. Meissen porcelain, model ca. 1750. From Melitta Kunze-Köllensperger, Idylle in Porzellan (Leipzig, 1996), p. 29, fig. 11.

I would like to acknowledge the kind assistance provided by the late Claus Boltz, Cyrille Froissart, Sebastian Kuhn, Reino Liefke, Christina Prescott-Walker, Johannes Rafael, Martin Schuster, Dominic Simpson, Julia Weber, Jody Wilkie, Samuel Wittwer, Alfred Ziffer and the staff of the Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv in Dresden. Publications by Stefan Bursche, Meredith Chilton, Ivan Day and Selma Schwartz have been informative and influential.

- The inventories under discussion are in the Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, 10006 Oberhofmarschallamt, T, XI, Nr. 53a-b, 54a-b, 60 and 61a-b. I am currently preparing transcriptions of these inventories for publication. For further background, see Maureen Cassidy-Geiger, "The Hof-Conditorey in Dresden: Traditions and Innovations in Sugar and Porcelain", Ulrich Pietsch and Claudia Banz (eds.), Triumph of the Blue Swords: Meissen Porcelain for Aristocracy and Bourgeoisie 1710-1815 (Dresden/Leipzig, 2010), pp. 120-131.
- A dozen drawings representing Meissen table decorations of ca. 1745-55 in the Kupferstich-Kabinett in Dresden (inv. nrs. C6644-6659) have likewise been overlooked by Meissen scholars until recently; Reino Liefke and I will both be discussing and illustrating some of the drawings in forthcoming publications.
- The Arbeitsberichte warrants comprehensive study and an annotated edition. Portions of a DDR-era typoscript of selected entries were published under the title Die Arbeitsberichte des Meissener Porzellamodelleurs Johann Joachim Kaendler 1706-1775 (Leipzig, 2002). For further discussion, see Johannes Rafael, Zur "Taxa Kaendler", KERAMOS 203/204, 2009, pp. 25-70. See as well Katharina Christiane Herzog's dissertation "Mythologische Kleinplastik in Meissener Porzellan 1710-1775" [http://katalog.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/ cgi-bin/titel.cgi?katkey=67284063]
- Patricia Ferguson traces the history of Meissen porcelain temples in "Felbrigg's Folly: The Meissen 'Temple of Honour' in Dresden", National Trust Historic Houses & Collections Annual 2010, pp. 12-17.
- For more on Acier, see Pauline Gräfin von Spee's dissertation, "Die Klassizistische Porzellanplastik der Meissener Manufaktur von 1764bis 1814" [http:// hss.ulb.uni-bonn.de/2004/0530/0530.htm]
- Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, Hausmarschallamt, R XVI, Nr. 37, Inventarium über das Churfürstli: Neue Flügelgebæude [...] Taschenberg, fols. 39-49.

- For transcriptions of the 1753 and later inventories of Brühl's porcelains, see Schwanenservice.
  Meissener Porzellan für Heinrich Graf von Brühl (Dresden, 2000).
- The quantities exported to France by the marchands-merciers would inflate this number.
- I have created a spreadsheet to track the numbers and types of tables decorations in the inventories, and the losses. The results will be published with the inventory transcriptions.
- 10. See Julia Weber, Meissener Porzellane mit Dekoren nach ostasiatischen Vorbildern, vol. II, pp. 344-356.
- 11. Not to be confused with his palace on the Elbe.
- 12. Reino Liefke has overseen the restoration of what survives of the famous porcelain fountain in the V&A and will publish his research; for some background, see http://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/creating-neweurope-1600-1800-galleries/in-the-middle-of-thetable-was-a-fountain-which-ran-all-the-while-withrose-water
- 13. See Anna Olenska, "Magnificentia principis: Brühl's seats in Poland as a means of his political self-propaganda", Tomasz Torbus, "Baustaftungen Heinrich Graf Brühl in Sachsen: Beispiel Nischwitz und Pförten (Brody)" and Jakub Sito, Architekten und Bildhauer im Dienste Heinrich von Brühls in Warschau" in Ute Christina Koch and Cristina Ruggero (eds), Premierminister und Mäzen. Heinrich Graf von Brühl (1700-1763)/ Primo ministro e mecenate. Il conte Heinrich von Brühl (1700-1763) [forthcoming]
- 14. Melitta Kunze-Köllensperger, Idylle in Porzellan: Kostbare Tischdekoration aus Meissen (Leipzig, 1996). The farmhouse models are known with giltbronze mounts, indicating a French clientele for this particular building type.
- 15. By chance, two churches and two farmhouses appear in the Hubertusburg inventory.